CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND SIXTY-FOURTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 22 May 1997, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Berdennikov (Russian Federation)

GE.97-61366 (E)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 764th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset, allow me to extend a warm welcome on behalf of the Conference, and on my own behalf, to the newly appointed representative of Germany to the Conference on Disarmament, Ambassador Günther Seibert, who is attending the Conference for the first time today. I wish to assure him of our cooperation and support.

I have on my list of speakers for today the representatives of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, India and Poland. I now give the floor to the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Ambassador Weston.

Sir Michael WESTON (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): First, Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency. You are carrying out your tasks with the dedication and professionalism one would expect of someone with whom it is always an enormous pleasure to work and for whom I have the greatest personal respect. Borrowing and adapting slightly the words which the late Lord Caradon used when speaking of Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetsov:

"When prospects are dark and hopes are dim,
We know that we must turn to him.
When storms and tempests fill the sky,
Berdennikov's your boy's the cry.
He comes like a dove from the Russian Ark,
And light appears where all was dark.
His coming quickly turns the tide,
The propaganda floods subside.
And now that he has changed the weather,
In complementarity we work together.
God bless the Russian delegation.
I hope this worked in translation."

I should like to draw the attention of the Conference to statements made yesterday by the United Kingdom Prime Minister, Mr. Blair, and by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Cook, in the House of Commons in response to parliamentary questions on the subject of anti-personnel landmines. In his statement, the Prime Minister said, inter alia:

"... we will ban the import, export, transfer and manufacture of anti-personnel landmines. We will also phase out the United Kingdom stocks of such anti-personnel landmines. We will, in addition, make sure that we ban the trade through the United Kingdom of all such landmines. They have done enormous carnage often to wholly innocent civilians including children, and the sooner that Britain gives a lead in this, the better. It is the right and the civilized thing to do."

(Sir Michael Weston, United Kingdom)

In his statement, which followed soon after that of the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary said:

"We shall implement our manifesto commitment to ban the import, export, transfer and manufacture of all forms of anti-personnel landmines.

"We will accelerate the phasing out of our stocks of anti-personnel landmines, and complete it by 2005 or when an effective international agreement to ban their use enters into force, whichever comes first. In the meantime, we have introduced a complete moratorium on their operational use, while we participate constructively in the Ottawa Process and push in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva for a wider ban.

"That moratorium will only be suspended if we judge that for a specific operation the security of our armed forces would be jeopardized without the possibility of the use of anti-personnel landmines. In such an exceptional case we would report to Parliament the decision, and the circumstances which led to it.

"We shall also examine how we can make more progress in removing mines already laid across the world."

I believe that these statements speak for themselves. I might make quite clear, however, lest there be any room for doubt about our position with respect to work on this issue here in the Conference on Disarmament: the United Kingdom continues strongly to support the immediate establishment of an ad hoc committee on anti-personnel landmines with a negotiating mandate.

We regret that it has not yet proved possible to reach a consensus on the establishment of such an ad hoc committee. In the interests of achieving such a consensus, the United Kingdom fully supports the immediate appointment of a special coordinator to conduct consultations on the most appropriate arrangement to deal with the question of anti-personnel landmines under agenda item 6.

In the course of such consultations, we would expect that the special coordinator would naturally wish to take account of relevant proposals which have already been put forward in this Conference. In this respect, I might also draw the attention of the Conference to the comments which the Secretary of State made in a press release concerning his statement, in which he said:

"We will also redouble our efforts at the Geneva Conference on Disarmament to get the main export countries to stop selling landmines."

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for his statement and for his very kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of India, Ambassador Ghose.

Ms. GHOSE (India): Mr. President, this is the first time I take the floor in the plenary this year, and I would like to emphasize how pleased we are to see the CD in your experienced and competent hands. I cannot hope to match the eloquence of the previous speaker, but I am sure that you will be able to find ways in which your presidency will conclude with a satisfactory result. You have the assurance of the cooperation of the Indian delegation in your efforts. Appreciation is also due to your predecessors for their determined efforts to carry out a trying and complex mandate. May I also welcome all our colleagues who have joined the CD this year and say, since I am taking the floor for the first time, how much we miss some of the extraordinary persons who were our colleagues till a short while ago.

The multilateral disarmament agenda, as we see it, gives us some satisfaction and some concern. We are extremely encouraged with the entry into force last month of the Chemical Weapons Convention. In this connection we welcome the ratification of the Convention by China and the United States and the statements made to the first meeting of the States parties by President Yeltsin and the Russian Duma. In our view, this Convention is significant not only because it bans the development, production, stockpiling and use of one of the weapons of mass destruction, but also because it is the very first effective and equitable disarmament treaty. Some progress has also been made in our efforts to strengthen the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), and we look forward to receiving the rolling text of the Chairman at an early date so that actual negotiations can begin in July this year. However, I have to place on record my disappointment that consensus on convening a special session on disarmament eluded us at the Disarmament Commission this year, because of the reluctance of some States to address, multilaterally, the issue of the elimination of nuclear weapons, the third and remaining weapon of mass destruction. It would appear that it is this same issue that has held up agreement in the CD since the beginning of the year, so that despite intensive consultations all that we have been able to achieve so far is the adoption of an agenda.

India has, since the beginning of this session, been participating actively in the consultations, since we believe that the CD must fulfil its role effectively as a negotiating body. Our priorities in the disarmament agenda were clearly spelt out last year in this forum as well as in the General Assembly. We, therefore, have participated in this exercise with the expectation that there would, at the very least, be consideration of a way forward on the issue of nuclear disarmament. This is not just an issue of paramount importance to us, but also for the international community. Over the last several months, calls for the immediate commencement of negotiations leading to the elimination of nuclear weapons have been made from many quarters, including the G-21 proposal of 14 March 1996 in the CD for the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament and the programme of action presented to the CD late last year by 28 countries.

Other distinguished voices have also been raised. The Canberra Commission emphasizes three fundamental reasons against the continued possession of nuclear weapons: their inadequate military utility, the risk of accidental or unauthorized launch and the fact that the possession of nuclear

(Ms. Ghose, India)

weapons by only five countries was an unacceptable and unsustainable situation. The Commission's report devotes considerable attention to the arguments usually put forward by the nuclear-weapon States and others who doubt the need for a nuclear-weapon-free world and authoritatively answers each of the objections raised. The Commission, on which, I might add, India was not represented, has suggested an urgent programme of action, commencing with an unequivocal and unambiguous commitment to be made by the nuclear-weapon States for the elimination of nuclear weapons. This report has been formally presented to the Conference on Disarmament and yet we have had no discussions or consideration of the concrete proposals contained in it. Other voices arguing the moral untenability of nuclear weapons include the proposal of the Stimson Center of the United States and the declaration of the 60 retired admirals and generals from all continents - all of whom have been urging the early commencement of negotiations for the total elimination, not only the reduction, of nuclear weapons.

Most significantly, the historic advisory opinion given by the International Court of Justice unanimously called for the urgent commencement and conclusion of negotiations for the elimination of nuclear weapons. We believe that it is incumbent on the CD to be responsive to the increasingly insistent international opinion that substantive and meaningful steps be taken towards the goal of eliminating all nuclear weapons.

In this context, we welcome the joint statement on "Parameters on future reductions in nuclear forces" issued by the Presidents of the Russian Federation and the United States. We have noted with appreciation the reaffirmation of the commitment of President Clinton and President Yeltsin to take further concrete steps to reduce the nuclear danger, and that these steps, both START II and the proposed START III, are envisaged to be completed within specific time-frames. We look forward to all nuclear-weapon States joining this process early.

The argument has been put forward that since there is progress in nuclear weapons reductions at the bilateral level, the CD cannot, and indeed should not, undertake nuclear disarmament negotiations, that insistence on discussing nuclear disarmament in the CD could be a setback to the disarmament process, since disarmament is based on security interests. Perhaps we should be clear about the definitions of terms we utilize: no one would wish, I'm sure, to halt or stall an ongoing bilateral and plurilateral process of nuclear weapons reductions: however, to us, nuclear disarmament is the goal, not only a process. Also, if the bilateral and plurilateral negotiations depend, quite validly, on the security perceptions of those engaged in this process, the security perceptions of those who do not possess nuclear weapons also need to be taken into account. And it is here that the CD can and must play its role, and there are specific proposals we can consider: for example, earlier this year a proposal was made to negotiate a commitment by all States for the elimination of nuclear weapons in an agreed time-frame; there is the proposal of the 28 countries for a phased time-bound programme including a proposal for a convention on no use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. There are several such proposals. We believe the CD is the place, the forum with the capacity to negotiate such agreements.

(Ms. Ghose, India)

India was one of the lead sponsors in the United Nations General Assembly in 1993 in proposing a resolution on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT). We had participated in the consensus reached in 1995, contained in the Shannon report just before the NPT Review and Extension Conference, but we had also expressed, it will be recalled, our reservations at the time on the tenuous nature of the compromise. Subsequent developments and the recent statements by a number of delegations indicate that these reservations are widely shared. The issue of stockpiles, the inclusion of tritium, the problem of surplus stocks, are some of the grey areas of the Shannon report which appear even more grey after two years. It is our conviction that these can be clarified if we adopt a clear work programme that places the mandate for an FMCT firmly within a multilateral nuclear disarmament process. India remains convinced that an FMCT can be a useful and necessary step, but as part and parcel of a negotiated, phased programme for the elimination of nuclear weapons. It is for this reason that we, with other members of the CD, including most members of the G-21, have proposed the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament.

Our policies in this respect have remained consistent. We are aware that nuclear weapons cannot be eliminated overnight. We realize that a step-by-step approach is necessary, but we are also convinced, that if progress towards nuclear disarmament is to be genuine, these steps must take place within a reasonable and specified time-frame. These steps cannot be repetitive efforts to tighten an unequal nuclear regime, but must be a progression towards a nuclear-weapon-free world. This was the context, it will be recalled, in which we had also visualized a comprehensive test-ban treaty.

However, we are also prepared to start work on other items of the agenda: we believe that some meaningful work could be done if the Ad Hoc Committee on Outer Space is revived: the resolution adopted in the last session of the United Nations General Assembly has given us a mandate to start this work, and it has, we understand, been proposed for inclusion in the programme of work by Canada. We also have noted with appreciation the efforts of Iran to adopt a different approach to the programme of work. We are not averse to considering commencing work on any of the other areas on which there might be consensus.

One issue on which considerable attention has been focused this year has been on the issue of a treaty to ban anti-personnel landmines (APLs). We are also all aware of the initiatives taken in this regard outside the CD. India's position on a treaty to ban APLs was stated by the External Affairs Minister in his address to the United Nations General Assembly in October 1996, when he said: "India is in favour of a non-discriminatory and universal ban on anti-personnel mines, which cripple or kill large number of civilians".

During the negotiations for strengthening Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), India, in response to the damage and destruction caused by the indiscriminate and irresponsible use of landmines to civilian life and livelihood, had made several proposals. Our proposals,

which received little support at that stage, included a ban on transfers, a ban on the use of remotely delivered mines, and a ban on the use of anti-personnel landmines in internal conflicts. Unfortunately, as I have just stated, none of these proposals received much support. We therefore accepted whatever it was felt was achievable last March. We are now in the process of completing formalities to ratify the amended Protocol II at an early date.

India has remained flexible in the current debate over the forum for negotiations for achieving a global ban on APLs. It is clear that an effective and universal ban would be achieved only if the legitimate concerns of all countries are addressed in the negotiations. We believe that a pragmatic, phased approach towards a global ban could be a suitable framework for addressing the security concerns of several countries who still use APLs, in compliance with humanitarian law, for defensive purposes against enemy forces. Our objective is to get an effective and universal treaty - one which will indeed prevent further indiscriminate casualties among civilians. While moving towards a ban on APLs, the international community needs to redouble its efforts for mine clearance and for the transfer of resources and technologies for this purpose so that the mines which are today actually causing death and destruction are removed.

We are prepared to work with all our colleagues to agree on a feasible and practical programme of work for the CD. However, I wish to reiterate once more our position on agenda item 1: Nuclear disarmament remains our primary objective, and our priority. For as long as nuclear weapons continue in the possession of a few countries, international security remains threatened and unstable. We hope that this forum will be able to respond to the expectations that the international community has of it.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of India for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Poland, Ambassador Dembinski.

Mr. DEMBINSKI (Poland): Mr. President, since your term of office as President of the Conference on Disarmament is about to expire, I am pleased to add to the customary congratulations our sincere appreciation of your wise leadership and efforts which you have been making to ensure that the second part of the CD session is more rewarding than has been the case so far. I should like to take this opportunity to express to your predecessor, the distinguished representative of Romania, our gratitude for his dedication and sense of urgency with which he pursued the same objective.

At this time let me also extend a warm welcome in our midst to the new representatives who have joined us at this table, the distinguished Ambassadors Giuseppe Balboni Acqua of Italy and Günter Seibert of Germany. I look forward to close and fruitful cooperation with them in our common endeavours. I would also like to congratulate Ms. Katharine Crittenberger on her accession to the first line at this table.

(Mr. Dembinski, Poland)

The primary motive behind my brief statement today is a sense of profound disappointment over our work programme, or rather the lack of it. It is with a sense of growing frustration - present also in the interventions of other speakers - that my delegation sees the Conference on Disarmament unable to overcome the embarrassing stalemate and recognize the grave jeopardy into which this situation puts the future of the Conference. It is frustrating to see the deplorable loss of precious time that could be put to productive use, in the interest of peace and international security. It is a frustration at the waste of scarce United Nations funds. It is also a frustration at the sense of dissatisfaction which the outside world must feel at our performance this year. Surely, one can argue that after years of strenuous efforts, resulting in two major multilateral accords, the CD members deserve time off. Of course, this line of thinking need not go particularly well with legislators and taxpayers in our respective countries. Sometimes it is suggested that the Conference on Disarmament is not an assembly line where multilateral disarmament accords are put together one after another, year after year. But then, if we want the CD to live up to its image, if we want it to retain its relevance - so far beyond question - we, its members, must say that, well, enough is enough. We have no more time to waste in the CD, especially at a moment when its two latest products - the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty - are receiving independent international status.

As we know, no CD member is obligated in the exercise of sovereign rights to accept or adhere to any treaty worked out and adopted by the Conference on Disarmament. It would, therefore, seem only fair to expect that by the same token, members would refrain from blocking proceedings of this body. After all, preventing others, often a majority, from negotiating such international instruments as they deem important or urgently needed may be construed as denying them the chance to exercise their rights. In Poland's view, we are duty-bound to reach an agreement without further delay on a programme of work that includes constructive negotiations on two issues, both with clear treaty potential: the prohibition of the production of fissile materials for weapons and other military purposes and a ban on anti-personnel landmines. In our considered opinion, the Conference on Disarmament has no right to temporize any longer in that regard for a number of reasons. Here are some of them: The cold war confrontation and its threats are now but an echo of a distant past; the NPT features as a permanent mainstay of a global non-proliferation regime; nuclear disarmament is making steady progress and, as confirmed by the recent Russian-American summit meeting in Helsinki, will continue on this path; all five nuclear-weapon Powers, once again, in an important collective declaration at the PrepCom meeting in New York, are reaffirming their commitments under the Non-Proliferation Treaty; finally, let us be mindful of the relevant General Assembly decisions: resolution 48/75 L on cut-off, which was approved by consensus, and resolution 51/45 S on APLs, which was approved without a dissenting vote. Both of these resolutions call on the CD to take specific action on their subject matter.

These considerations notwithstanding, our present quandary has no justification in the CD record either. As we recall, the Conference on Disarmament resolved to establish an ad hoc committee on a cut-off; and agreed on the broad "Shannon formula" as its mandate back in 1995. So, as far as

(Mr. Dembinski, Poland)

substance is concerned, the ground has been already broken. That consensus decision stands if one truly respects the rules of procedure. To my knowledge no one has ever questioned these rules, much less denounced them. Thus in regard to cut-off, we would not be starting from scratch. All we need is to take a procedural decision to name the Committee Chairman and have that subsidiary body discharge its mandate. By allowing, inter alia, for the consideration of stocks, the language of the mandate takes due account of all legitimate concerns. If we disclaim linkage, one wonders why agreement is still elusive on cut-off.

Let me now turn to the anti-personnel landmines (APLs) issue. The Polish delegation has been on record for quite some time, both in the CD and in the United Nations General Assembly First Committee, as believing that for humanitarian, international security and disarmament reasons, the question of anti-personnel landmines should be urgently addressed. We kept indicating that, in our view, the CD could conceivably serve as a suitable venue. However, we welcomed the "Ottawa Process" and had no hesitation to associate with its ultimate goals.

To promote these goals and heeding calls of the international community, including those emanating from the 1996 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Review Conference, the relevant United Nations General Assembly resolutions and the Ottawa meeting last September, Poland imposed a temporary moratorium on international transfers of APLs. I can now formally inform the CD that this moratorium, on its expiry at the end of 1997, will be replaced by a permanent ban of indefinite duration. The Polish Parliament has also started appropriate ratification procedures in respect of the "landmine" Protocol II to the CCW Convention.

The Polish delegation is greatly encouraged by the growing recognition that there need be neither contradiction nor unhealthy competition between the CD and the "Ottawa Process" - indeed, that there is a complementarity of efforts. We would wish that recognition to be translated without further delay into concrete action by the CD. To this end, at the close of the first part of our session, Poland joined Chile and Finland in suggesting that a special coordinator be appointed with a view to exploring, through intensive consultations, the most appropriate arrangement through which the Conference on Disarmament could deal with the question of APLs. The three delegations suggested, it now appears over-optimistically, that he should present a report to the CD by the end of May.

Having said that, let me make explicit our support for the initiative which Hungary and Japan took last Thursday in submitting a draft mandate for an appropriate ad hoc committee. Indeed, as far as the Polish delegation is concerned, we would have preferred the CD to take positive action on that proposal and we urge it to do so without delay.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Poland for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. That concludes my list of speakers for today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? I see the Ambassador of Germany. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. SEIBERT (Germany): Mr. President, since it is the first time I am taking the floor in the plenary session of the Conference on Disarmament, I should like to take this opportunity to express my deep satisfaction at seeing you assume the presidency of this Conference, and we are very grateful for the dedication and the wisdom with which you are carrying out your task. I should also like to thank you and Ambassador Dembinski for your warm words of welcome.

It is for me both an honour and a particular challenge to be appointed Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament. In the course of its history, and particularly during recent years, the Conference on Disarmament has achieved outstanding successes. Treaties such as the ban on chemical weapons and the comprehensive test-ban treaty are making a lasting contribution to peace and security. The CD has thus set very high standards for itself.

I am looking forward to working with you and all the other distinguished Permanent Representatives towards making the CD live up to these standards in the future in order to make this world a safer and more peaceful place.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Germany for his statement and for his kind words. Now I give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. CAMPBELL (Australia): Mr. President, as this is the first, and possible the last, opportunity I will have to acknowledge your assumption of the presidency, let me say that my delegation has welcomed and appreciated the excellent way in which you have guided, and continue to guide, our deliberations in keeping with the pattern set by your predecessors this year. I also take the opportunity to welcome new colleagues to the Conference.

Australia's commitment to progress in the Conference on Disarmament, after years of successes, is well known. Also well-known is our commitment to the negotiation of a legally binding international regime which effectively outlaws anti-personnel landmines as a weapon of war and civilian terror, and which complements all other processes seeking this end. With that in mind, I have the pleasure to table on behalf of Australia the following draft decision in the Conference on Disarmament, and I will read what it is I propose. It is headed:

"Draft decision

"Without prejudice to its ongoing efforts to establish the programme of work for its 1997 session and in order to facilitate them the Conference on Disarmament decides:

"1. To appoint a special coordinator to conduct consultations on the most appropriate arrangement to deal with the question of anti-personnel landmines under agenda item 6.

(Mr. Campbell, Australia)

"2. The Special Coordinator shall take into consideration all relevant proposals, present and future.

"3. The Special Coordinator shall present an early report to the Conference on Disarmament."

I would like to ask you to convene the Conference in informal consultations immediately following this plenary session to discuss this proposal. I am aware that there are many views on this subject in this room, many ideas on language, some of which have already been formally tabled in this Conference. This language, as you know, has been carefully crafted to seek a way through these various positions and can be further examined in these informal consultations in what I hope will be a constructive and positive spirit.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Ambassador of Australia for his statement and his kind words.

(continued in Russian)

Distinguished delegates, you have heard the proposal made by the distinguished Ambassador of Australia, who made a proposal which he read out and also proposed that we immediately convene consultations to consider that proposal. I can see that the distinguished Ambassador of Morocco has asked for the floor.

Mr. BENJELLOUN-TOUIMI (Morocco) (translated from French): I would like to thank the Ambassador of Australia for his proposal. In general, the Australian delegation has always made us accustomed to constructive proposals, and I think this is one of them. I would like to reiterate that my delegation is never against informal discussions of this type, because this always enables us to share our viewpoints and to learn about the ins and outs of the issues put before us. But I must say as of now that what I would like in order to have a useful discussion is perhaps to get the proposal and send it to our capitals and then afterwards we could discuss it. But I am definitely not refusing to discuss the matter. Nevertheless I can tell you as of now that I have no instructions from my capital on this sort of question, insofar as I get the impression that views are divided on this issue, which has been mentioned since the beginning of this session. So with that comment I will not oppose these consultations, but I can tell you at the outset that by far the greatest part of my participation will consist of listening.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Morocco for his statement. I understood him to say that Morocco will not object to convening an informal meeting. I see that the distinguished representative of Cuba has asked for the floor. I give him the floor.

Mr. AMAT FORES (Cuba) (translated from Spanish): Simply, and very briefly, it seems to us that what the distinguished Ambassador of Morocco has said may be applicable to other countries. It is to us. I think it would

(Mr. Amat Fores, Cuba)

facilitate the work that is being proposed if we could obtain the proposal and analyse it and consult with our foreign ministries, and then seek guidance which would enable us to come much better prepared to tackle a discussion and a debate thoroughly and seriously. Independently of the position that our country holds, we would also be ready to take part in this analysis, this debate, but I think the outcome might be a bit vague if at the end we could not take a decision and we would not be able to reach any conclusion. So we support what the distinguished representative of Morocco said and we feel this is the way we ought to act.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I thank the distinguished representative of Cuba for his statement. I am in a somewhat difficult position. On the one hand, I have a proposal from the distinguished Ambassador of Australia to convene consultations now to consider this question. Two speakers who spoke after that proposal have said that on the whole they do not object but they have doubts about the possibility of reaching any concrete conclusions at the end of such a discussion. In my view, on s'engage et on voit - you get involved and then you see what happens. So, if there are no objections, I would propose that we should now suspend our meeting, and in 10 minutes convene in room 1 open-ended consultations on the proposal made by the distinguished Australian Ambassador, and hold such consultations. We will see what transpires and then return to this room and conclude our meeting. Are there any objections to that approach? I give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Morocco.

Mr. BENJELLOUN-TOUIMI (Morocco): I should like to make two remarks: I would rather have the meeting here because there are too many people, and I do not think we can all fit in room 1. That is my first remark. My second remark is that we do not need to come back here because nothing will change between now and then. As I told you, I do not have instructions and I do not see why we should come back here. A third remark is perhaps that we should extend our discussions to any other subject that any delegation might wish to raise regarding the programme of work.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I thank the distinguished representative of Morocco for his comments. As for the room in which we should meet, I have no preference. I am prepared to change my proposal so that we would meet here. But as regards resuming the plenary session, that clearly is necessary because we will reach some conclusion. Perhaps Morocco's position may be the very one that he referred to. But we will probably hear the views of other delegations as well. The distinguished representative of Sri Lanka has asked for the floor.

Mr. GOONETILLEKE (Sri Lanka): Briefly, I should like to make two points. One refers to the comment made by the Ambassador of Morocco, and that is that it would be desirable for us to meet in this room rather than in room 1, given the number of delegations. Secondly, if we are going to have any discussion on the proposal made by the distinguished Ambassador of Australia, it would be helpful for us to have the text of the proposal before we start consultations.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I thank the distinguished representative of Sri Lanka. I would like to inquire of the representatives of the secretariat when we can get the text introduced by the distinguished representative of Australia.

(continued in English)

I am informed that it will take 10 minutes. In 10 minutes you will get the proposal, as I understand it, in one language only though, in English.

(continued in Russian)

The distinguished Ambassador of Nigeria has asked for the floor.

Mr. ABUAH (Nigeria): I should like to join my voice to the comments just made by the distinguished Ambassador of Morocco on the text which has just been introduced by our colleague from Australia. Like the Ambassador of Sri Lanka, I am aware that some of us have not received copies of this text, and I believe it is normal for us to have a text before us before we can have any informal consultations on it.

But beyond that, I believe I can say that the proposal about the APLs is very interesting. The damage caused by APLs to our structures back in the continent of Africa, destruction of lives and property, is immense. The distinguished Ambassador of the United Kingdom has pointed to some of these effects. It is a proposal about how to put an end to the carnage. We support that. But our capitals - in my case, our capital in Abuja - will have to pronounce themselves on the text before we can proceed. I do not know whether informal consultations on the text as read out by the distinguished Ambassador of Australia can do very much at this stage. I wonder if time should not be allowed for Governments and representatives of Governments gathered here to get copies of the text, refer it to Government, and return to the CD for consultations about the way forward.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I thank the distinguished representative of Nigeria. If I understood his comment correctly, he suggests that we should not hold an informal meeting now but that we should give Governments an opportunity to study this proposal introduced by Australia. I give the floor to the distinguished representative of Nigeria.

Mr. ABUAH (Nigeria): Maybe I am partly responsible for the misunderstanding. While it is important for my Government to have a chance to look at this text and pronounce itself on it and convey appropriate instructions to us, we do not stand in the way of the Conference and the informal meeting to consult on the draft decision. But as far as Nigeria is concerned, we do not have any instructions to consider it because our Government has not even seen it.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Nigeria, who has clarified his position. As I understand it, he is not objecting to the holding of an informal meeting. I give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Cuba.

Mr. AMAT FORES (Cuba) (translated from Spanish): Reflecting on the proposal being discussed at the moment, we are asking ourselves, and we wish to ask the Chair and the rest of the participants: why are we going to embark on a discussion of one proposal when we have also been studying others? There are proposals from the representative of Iran, from the representative of Egypt, and from several other countries, and suddenly we cast aside those other proposals and start considering the one formulated today by the distinguished representative of Australia. So from a procedural point of view, what happens to the other proposals? What is our situation with regard to the other proposals? Why are we discussing this one in this way and not the others? This is a question we are asking ourselves and we are thinking that perhaps we could have some clarification on it so as to understand the step we are going to take.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I thank the distinguished representative of Cuba for his statement and the question he asked. The answer is very simple, because the distinguished representative of Australia has made his proposal and has made an official proposal for the immediate holding of consultations on this question. That is precisely why the President has raised this question before the entire membership of the Conference. As for other questions, I can inform distinguished delegates that at yesterday's Presidential consultations all these questions were raised and the discussion with the participation of the group coordinators showed that there had been no changes in the positions of the groups and that unfortunately there were no points of convergence on these questions. In this connection these questions are not being proposed and have not been proposed by any of the coordinators for urgent discussion. And the President is not proposing them either, in view of the situation. As for the proposal from Australia, this is a new proposal which was made at this meeting with a proposal for immediate consultations on it.

We are trying to reach a decision on this specific proposal. I made a proposal as to how in practice we should implement the Australian proposal. Several speakers have said that unfortunately they have no instructions and they have their doubts about the outcome of such consultations, but even so they do not object to holding such consultations. In these circumstances, once again I ask the same question. If nobody objects, then we have to follow the proposal which was made by the distinguished representative of Australia. If anybody objects, then obviously we won't have consensus and we can't hold anything. But since nobody has objected, what else can we do but follow the proposal made by the distinguished representative of Australia? The situation is very simple, it seems to me.

The distinguished Ambassador of Morocco has asked for the floor.

Mr. BENJELLOUN-TOUIMI (Morocco) (translated from French): Thank you, Mr. President, for that explanation, which has clarified things. I would just like to say that the Ambassador of Australia has made a proposal. I will make a second one. I would like to include the efficiency of the methods of work of this Conference in the consultations that you wish to hold after the formal meeting, because quite clearly we are no longer respecting the traditions of

(Mr. Benjelloun-Touimi, Morocco)

this Conference. In more than two years I have never had before my eyes anything that we had to discuss immediately and come back to the plenary to take a decision. I do not remember this as being a usual practice in this Conference. I believe that the Ambassador of Australia simply suggested that we hold consultations after this plenary; he did not say that we had to come back to take a decision on his proposal. That is the first comment I would like to make. So if you want to hold consultations after this plenary and stop there, and then we will see, because as some people have pointed out, we have to go back to our capitals, and if there is a consensus I would be very happy to be able to tell my capital that there is a consensus in the Conference, and so what does Morocco want to do on this matter? I would be very happy to transmit that kind of message, but I would like to include in the proposal made by the Ambassador of Australia another question, that is, the efficiency of the working methods of this Conference. So we will have two questions to study in the informal consultations without going back to the plenary because, as I have already said, I have no instructions, and so if we come back to the plenary, we cannot have any positive results, so what is the point in coming back? That is why I asked you for an explanation of why we should come back to the plenary.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Morocco for his statement and the proposal he made. Have I understood correctly that the distinguished Ambassador of Morocco is proposing a slight change in the subject of possible informal consultations by expanding it and including an additional issue? Have I understood correctly that if this expansion does not take place, then he objects to the holding of consultations exclusively on the Australian proposal?

I see that the distinguished representative of Morocco is not objecting to the Australian proposal.

The distinguished Ambassador of India has asked for the floor.

Ms. GHOSE (India): I had not meant to take the floor in a formal plenary on this procedural debate. It was my understanding of your proposal, Mr. President, that if we were to convene in an informal meeting, as proposed by the delegation of Australia, we would necessarily have to reconvene to formally conclude this plenary session. Regardless, a formal conclusion of the plenary today would have to take place at some point, particularly as I believe this is the last time that you will be President and you will be handing over the presidency over the weekend. That will enable you to give your concluding remarks, so I think that in that sense there should not be an objection to a formal reconvening of the plenary to enable the President to make his concluding remarks, whatever they might be, related or unrelated to the discussions in the informal consultations. This was my understanding. I do not know whether we can solve questions so fast in this particular room, but we are all willing to give it a try.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of India for her understanding and for her statement. The distinguished Ambassador of Morocco has the floor.

Mr. BENJELLOUN-TOUIMI (Morocco): I think that if that is the understanding, I have no objection to coming back to the plenary, but it would be more efficient that you make whatever statement you want to make now, Mr. President, because, as I told you, the result is obvious to me. We will listen, we will report to our capitals, but I am not sure that you can draw any other conclusions. It seems that what Ambassador Ghose is saying is that it is difficult in maybe one hour's time to do anything that would allow you to say something more than you have already prepared. But, of course, you are the President and I am a delegate, so you decide, as long as we have the understanding that Ambassador Ghose has just outlined.

Mr. AMAT FORES (Cuba) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, first of all I would like to thank you for the explanation you provided about our earlier formulation, but in addition to the explanation you have given us, I have new doubts, because according to what you said, in the Presidential consultations that you held yesterday, there was no consensus on the other proposals, and my uncertainty, and my question, in that case is: was there any consensus about mines, to the effect that we are going to have consultations today, to take decisions and to return to the plenary to discuss the matter? Did they reach agreement and arrive at consensus on the question of mines? In our view this subject is on an equal footing with the other proposals that have been put forward. If there is no type of consensus on this we cannot see any reason for this haste in the specific case of the formulation made today by the distinguished Ambassador of Australia. So I am still assailed by these doubts, and I would really like some clarification on them.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I thank the distinguished representative of Cuba. Well, distinguished delegates, we have a dilemma. We have a proposal from the distinguished representative of Australia concerning the holding of immediate consultations. I still haven't heard a single voice against that, although I have heard quite a number of doubts expressed concerning the usefulness of holding such a meeting. I am in your hands. The President as such has no hidden agenda. I want to do my duty. I would like to hear advice from you as to what I should do. The distinguished Ambassador of Pakistan.

Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan): Perhaps it is time once again to go back to the lyrical praise which Ambassador Weston extended to you, Sir, at the beginning of this meeting. Certainly, we are in need of some poetry, if nothing else.

With regard to the Australian proposal, my delegation of course has no difficulty in entering into informal consultations, all the more so because I believe that it was the Pakistan delegation which was the first to propose, on 30 January, the idea of the creation of a special coordinator on the issue of anti-personnel landmines. However, I believe that it is the tradition of this Conference that we respect the views of all concerned, and I have no doubt that in any informal consultations which you convene, that tradition will continue to be respected and every delegation will have the opportunity to express its viewpoint with regard to the issue under discussion, so I have no hesitation in agreeing to informal consultations. That is the tradition of

(Mr. Akram, Pakistan)

this Conference. If there are positions with regard to the formulation or with regard to other issues and other proposals, I am sure that every delegation will be within its rights to raise this in the course of the informal consultations, and in the light of those discussions, you will draw the appropriate conclusions or inconclusions, as the case may be. Then we can proceed further. Perhaps it would be useful to adjourn this meeting and convene in informal session where all views and positions can be aired off the record.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I thank the distinguished representative of Pakistan. Is the Conference prepared to follow that advice? I see no objections. Thus I will now suspend this meeting and in 10 minutes in this room I will begin open-ended informal consultations.

The meeting was suspended at 11.20 a.m. and resumed at 6.10 p.m.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): The 764th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament is resumed.

Distinguished delegates, during the break important and I believe useful informal consultations took place on the proposal made by the distinguished representative of Australia which was put forward at this meeting. At the present time I cannot report that these consultations have led to any concrete result. As I understand it, they will be continued next week. I now intend to say a few words in the form of concluding observations.

When I took up my post as President of the CD, I fully realized the scale and the difficulties of the problems confronting the Conference, the solution of which must bring our forum to a genuine solution of the questions on the disarmament agenda, which have become ripe for multilateral consideration. In so doing I drew on the results which had been achieved by my predecessors as President in 1997, the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea and the representative of Romania in the CD. In particular, as you know, the agenda was adopted, intensive multilateral and bilateral consultations were held, which dealt both with the essence of the problems facing the Conference and with organizational arrangements for their consideration. I should like to express my sincere gratitude for the major efforts which were made by my distinguished predecessors.

As the representative of Russia, I must note that during the period when my country has occupied the post of President of the CD, important events have taken place from the point of view of real progress in the area of arms control and disarmament. A Russian-American summit took place in Helsinki, and the documents generated there on disarmament issues have been circulated at the Conference. The negotiations on the Founding Act between Russia and NATO were successfully concluded. A five-party agreement was signed on arms reductions in the area of the border between the former Soviet Union and China. The Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons entered into force. Also during this period, the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2000 NPT Review Conference was successfully held, attended by many CD representatives. It seems to me these events show that it would be

an exaggeration to project the difficulties which the CD has encountered recently onto the world outside this magnificent room. On the whole, the process of arms control is, as they say, "alive and well". We can only regret that the same cannot be said about the state of affairs in our Conference.

As you know, during my term of office as President, issues related to the adoption of a programme of work for the CD, both taken as a whole and each individually, have been discussed at the weekly Presidential consultations with the participation of the coordinators of the regional groups and China, and during my many bilateral contacts with individual delegations. Within the rigid framework circumscribing the work of the President of the CD, attempts were made to pursue any emerging possibilities for agreeing on a programme of work. I am grateful to the coordinators of the groups and all delegations for the activeness and perseverance they have shown in the search for acceptable solutions. During this period, the Conference had before it new documents such as the proposal from the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the CD's programme of work, the proposal by Chile, Poland and Finland to appoint a special coordinator to conduct consultations on the most appropriate arrangement to deal with the question of anti-personnel landmines, the draft mandate submitted by Hungary and Japan for an ad hoc committee on anti-personnel landmines and the draft mandate proposed by Egypt for an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament, as well as other proposals.

I note with satisfaction that these and earlier proposals for organizing the CD's work have been thoroughly studied by many delegations, and intensive negotiations have been and are continuing to be conducted on them. But despite that, it has not been possible to reach consensus on the programme of work for the CD at this stage. I will not go into my understanding of the reasons for this situation - to do so might be improper for the President. I will say only that evidently we all have to reconsider carefully what we actually expect of the CD and what we can realistically achieve from it at this stage.

I must admit that in the last few days we were close to taking a small but practically important step. I refer to the establishment of the post of special coordinator on anti-personnel landmines, which is unequivocally supported by the Russian Federation as well. I hope that the efforts in this area will be pursued and that this matter will be resolved as soon as possible.

The question of further expansion of the membership of the CD also occupied its proper place in our consultations in the Conference. I can state, I think, that there is already broad agreement about the possibility of establishing the post of special coordinator on that problem. However, on this issue too there has been no tangible progress so far. I hope that everyone will agree with me when I say that resolving the question of expanding the membership of the CD must not be drawn out indefinitely.

I should sincerely like to express my warmest and best wishes to the new President of the CD, the distinguished Ambassador of Senegal, Mrs. Diallo. She can fully count on our support in the search for constructive solutions to

(The President)

the difficult problems facing the Conference. I should also like to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. V. Petrovsky, the Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, all the secretariat staff and the interpreters for their inestimable assistance in organizing and carrying out the work of the Conference. I thank all the delegations to the Conference on Disarmament for their active cooperation with the President.

(continued in English)

The next plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will take place on Thursday, 29 May 1997 at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.